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Herding as preparation for war

Preparation for war began in youth. When boys were about ten or twelve they were sent to herd goats or calves; when they were older they herded the cattle. At this time the boys were in the bush with their elders who were often haughty and fierce. The older herders taught the boys how to fight and how to defend themselves. They taught them to fight with twigs and sticks; the older herders fought with *izinduku* (knobkerries) and *izinkhonjo* (wooden swords). They were not allowed to fight with real spears though some had them. The older herders stirred up the hearts of the younger to fight and taught them to strike each other with knobkerries and to use little shields. If the herders of one village met the herders of another, the bulls were teased till they fought, and the little herders also. The small herders were not allowed to say anything about the herding to their parents. The older herders also loved to fight as in war with those of other villages. At such times the older men and even the elders came out from the village to see the battle and to stir up the hearts of the boys. If the herders of one village ran away they were laughed at, but the winners were greatly praised.

At the time when the cattle ate the refuse in the maize-gardens, after harvest, fighting most often broke out. Some of the boys provoked their neighbours to go and drive the cattle into the maize-fields of another village deliberately. The custom was that cattle might eat in the maize-gardens of their own village and the boys ought to ask if they may go into the fields of others. The herders did this to annoy the other herders and to start a fight. Often a great struggle was the result and the young men of the village who had outgrown herding joined in the fight to help the youngsters of their village. But they did it sensibly, none caused a wound with a spear, for anyone who did that was punished by law.

So the boys grew accustomed to the first steps in fighting which would help them later in war. Those who knew how to protect themselves with a knobkerry and small shield had no scars on their heads, but there were many long ago who had scars from fighting in the herding time. Children of the chief were in the same predicament—if they could not defend themselves they were beaten by their herding companions and possibly got their heads broken. The flowing of blood was not considered very serious, only if one did it in a stealthy way then he had to pay compensation. In this way the boys grew up with stout hearts and loved fighting.

Another thing which excited the boys was the custom of whistling. The boys were very expert and quick in expressing changes of mood in whistling. This was done so that the cattle would go carefully or quickly, but also when they were fighting the herders loved to whistle and even the older men in war did so also. The whistling stirred up the hearts of those who were thinking of running away. There were many ways of whistling and some were very good at it.

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Enlistment

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When the young men reached the age of 21–26 they left off herding. Sometimes it was their fathers who stopped them, sometimes they themselves wished to stay at home. They took their shields (*amahawu*) and

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some for themselves as their perquisite. They then drove the cattle to pasture, and this might be some distance away when grass was scarce in the dry season. They sometimes drove the cattle back near the village to rest at noon under the shade trees, but if the pasture was far away the cattle rested there and went on feeding later. They were brought back to the kraal in the late afternoon and counted by one of the senior men.

The herd-boys taught each other to fight with sticks, to wrestle, to catch rats and small birds, to use the knobkerry, catapults, and bows and arrows. Sometimes in the afternoon they went to other villages and challenged another herd to a fight between bulls.[1] During the long day's herding, the boys used to drink milk, make *amasi* (milk curds) in a gourd and eat it, bake birds in clay and roast ears of maize taken from their mothers' grain stores. Precedence among the herd-boys depended first on age and only secondly on the rank and position of the families they belonged to. There was an easily recognizable air of authority and almost of arrogance among the older boys responsible for their fathers' and uncles' cattle. They superintended the process of letting out the cattle, milking them, driving them to pasture and the return to the kraal in the evening. Mounted on donkeys, wearing large straw hats made by themselves, the senior boys acted like ranch owners bossing up inefficient work hands.

This period of living in the *laweni* was, as we have seen, shared by boys of a wide age group. In a large village where there were two or three or four *laweni*, there was often one in each section, which generally meant that the boys belonging to one *banja* or section shared one *laweni*. This had the effect of dividing them up to some extent on a basis of family and rank, but in a *laweni* serving a whole village all the boys went in together whatever families they came from. There was no respecting of clan status in the *laweni* and young boys of high-ranking families had to wait on and obey older boys of lower rank. *Laweni* life was therefore a democratizing influence among the boys of the village, and no boys were excused from herding cattle because they belonged to a house which owned cattle. Even if some went to school and others did not, the school-boys had to take their share of herding in the holidays. Ngoni chiefs and leading men laid great emphasis on keeping the boys busy and making them carry out the work allotted to them. The older boys began to listen in at court cases and to discuss them among themselves. During the wet season from time to time they formed hoeing parties for clearing new ground and for the periodical weeding of gardens. They seldom did any continuous cultivation, as the women and the older men did, and a boy who liked to go off and hoe by himself was pointed out as one with rather peculiar tastes.

During this period of *laweni* life, when in addition to herding the

[1] For the relation between the training of herd-boys and preparation for war, see Part II, Chap. I, p. 30.

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were clearly defined aims in this care of girls after puberty, including instruction in personal hygiene and in pre-marital sexual relations. A girl's father's sisters and her own mother wanted to be able to say, when marriage negotiations began: *Ngombe zake zidzala*, 'her cattle are full', which was the comment made when girls were examined periodically to see if they were still virgin. To achieve this they constantly said to her: '*Mudzinange, mudzileze*', 'take care of yourself, control yourself'; and the *gogo* explained to the girl how she could protect herself. In one area where I lived, the chief's daughter was examined every week, with her *izidandani* or companions, and the girls who helped in the big house were examined every month. The strict behaviour required of Ngoni girls of good family was expected also of those of the same age who were members of the same household, either appointed to be with them as companions or as servants in the big house.

Looking forward to marriage involved not only preservation of her virginity. An Ngoni girl going to a strange village had to know how to perform women's work in the home, how to do it herself as well as how to direct others, and she had to be carefully trained in that meticulous and exclusive social behaviour required of Ngoni women of good family. She might be going to marry a man who intended to 'marry up', in which case she might be thought in one sense to be 'marrying below her station'. Yet her personal position as a member of her father's clan and family could not be altered by her marriage, and she was well aware that she was conferring something on the man and on the family she married into.

While the boys were learning their roles in later life in the democratic atmosphere of the *laweni* and of the boys' pursuits in the village, the girls in the later stage of their training after puberty were treated more individually, and were not left to find their level in a group of their age mates. The adult women took an active part in telling them how to behave, how to dress and how to cook. The girls of high-ranking families sometimes pounded maize with their age mates, singing as they did so, but more for fun than because their food depended on it. They learned to dress their hair and put on clothes, and to walk and dance in company with other girls, but always with the critical eye of their *gogo* upon them. Their lower-ranking companions could make mistakes and be careless, and walk and dance in an exaggerated fashion. Ngoni girls might never pass certain bounds of decorum, and the standard expected of them was high and exacting. I have heard *manina* of leading clans scold young girls many times for careless behaviour and badly done work.

In this training, as throughout that of the boys, there was a deliberate preparation for leadership. A girl's character and ability were being watched and, while an awareness of her personal dignity and position was being fostered, it was accompanied by requirements of obedience

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mother's household if the mother showed obvious signs of being a 'bad character'. They might take the child away and put her with some relative of acknowledged 'good character', in the hope of offsetting the effects of heredity by careful training.

In later childhood and especially on the threshold of adulthood, as we shall see in Chapters VI and VII, boys and girls were expected to learn and practise traditional Ngoni skills and to be conversant with traditional Ngoni knowledge. Skills and knowledge, or rather the ability to use them, might be inherited from a parent, but they were generally regarded as acquired qualities. In any case, they needed careful training and direction in order that they might be fully developed.

Ngoni cultural values

After the Scottish Mission had been in North Nyasaland for some time, and the Bible and other Christan literature had been translated into the vernacular, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* became one of the most popular and widely read books in Ngoniland, both by older children and by adults. The reason was that its imagery portrayed so many ideas and situations which the Ngoni recognized as being relevant for them in the new world to which they had to adapt themselves. It became for Ngoni Christians, and for many others too since it was told far more often than it was read, a new kind of folk-tale, and was told as such to children in school and in the villages. The themes of striving towards a goal, and fighting lions and giants on the way, and listening to good advice as well as hearing bad—these and other themes were recognized as in the Ngoni tradition although in such a different setting.

In the final chapter of this book we shall talk about personality and character among the Ngoni, looking at the ideas of basic personality as set out by Linton and others, and trying to see how training at different stages of childhood had been converging towards the ideal personality of the Ngoni

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561 related to a young child by kinship, there were three distinct
855 age-groups. Nearest in age to him were his older sisters,
602 children of his own mother, of his father's other wives, and of his father's brothers' wives. When he began to talk he
[601] addressed all these as 'sister', or rather as 'my sister', and they took a kindly interest in him, especially if he were a boy and therefore to be removed from them when the time came for him to live in the boys' dormitory. They played with him, they sometimes carried him about while the nurse girl
[262] did something else, they ground bulrush millet or roasted ground-nuts to give him as snacks. They were particularly
[868] concerned with teaching him to speak correctly, to say the right names for things, to use the correct terms for older
[533] people, and later to sing the refrains of little songs in their singing games.

Above this sister group in age came his own mother and his other 'mothers', who were his father's other wives and his father's brothers' wives. All of them he was taught to
[601] address as 'my mother'. His father's sisters on the other hand, who took a special interest in his upbringing, he addressed as 'woman father', and the name implied some
[554] measure of the authority which his father and his father's brothers exercised in the household and in the village.

Above this generation of mothers and woman-fathers came the grandmothers. Pre-eminent in supervising his life
[601] and the care taken of him was his father's own mother, but he also addressed as 'grandmother' his grandfather's other wives and his grandfather's brothers' wives.

561 The same triple grouping by age and generation, which
357 the child learned by degrees to distinguish among his own kin, was repeated among the 'helpers' in his mother's and grandmother's households. There were young children who were the children of the household staff. His nurse girl and her fellow nurse girls formed a slightly senior group in this division, both by reason of their responsibilities as well as of their age. Above them, as the next generation, were the

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of cloth hanging in front from a bead or grass waistband. They were all taught before that age, and most stringently after it, to sit correctly. For the little girls, this meant kneeling first and then sitting with the legs tucked on one side. They always smoothed down their scrap of cloth so that their genitals were covered. Little boys often squatted, sitting on their heels. Their correct position however, especially when eating food, was to sit with their legs crossed and the soles of their feet pressed against their thighs, and their cloth or skin apron arranged to cover their genitals.

Any rudeness in speech or action towards parents or elders was corrected at once, and the child was told: 'That is not the Ngoni way.' Studied courtesy included looking down when addressed by an elder, and as we saw in Chapter II, never walking behind a group of elders but passing in front of them, bending slightly forward and murmuring: 'I am before your eyes.'

Play places and playthings

In spite of what appeared like a somewhat restrictive régime, Ngoni children were merry and busy all their waking hours. Occasionally lack of health, or an awkward temperament, produced a child who sat around by himself, or glowered at other children, or was spiteful and vindictive. For the most part their nurse girls and older sisters paid them the attention they demanded, were always ready to provide distractions and amusements, and showed them how to use all that lay around them as playthings.

The places where they played depended on their age and mobility. The youngest children stayed round the hut and inside the fence. Occasionally the nurse girls and older sisters in the afternoons took them to a 'playground' on the outskirts of the village, where the older girls were accustomed to meet and practise dancing, or to thread beads and chatter. When the harvest was in, some of the older children about five and six years old, helped by the nurse girls, made 'play

FAMILY LIFE FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

In the dry season which was the dancing season children from three and four years upwards spent hours watching the older boys and girls dancing. On the edge of the main group small boys particularly would with intense solemnity and exaggerated movements practise steps and postures, singing meanwhile. The Ngoni used no drums and no musical instruments in their dancing, and despised the users of drums. All their rhythm and synchrony was achieved by perfect unison of action and voice. The little boys practising solo on the edge of a dance-group listened intently every now and then to get the rhythm correctly, shifted their feet and stamped with the rest.

The little girls were collected together by older girls now and then, and sometimes joined by the boys, to play games of catch and various miming games such as choosing a lover, hen and chickens, slave-raiding, baboons in the maize gardens. These were accompanied by songs in which the leader, or 'owner', of the game sang the story and the rest joined in the refrains. Many of these miming games called for alertness and co-operation, and the slow and solitary were soon shown up and laughed at. Another set of songs with refrains were ballads or stories without action, and these were listened to by the hour by the younger children towards the end of the day, especially if the singer of the ballad was a lively narrator.

Girl children of this age-group spent a lot of their time watching adults and older girls doing their household work. In time they learned to imitate the actions of pounding and grinding, using a small pole or a stone, of sweeping with a frayed-out stalk, of winnowing or sieving with a little basket, or ladling food with a tiny wooden spoon. When they went to the gardens with their mother, they were given a small branch to carry home on their heads for the fire. Later the little girls had a tiny pot put on their head, perched on a miniature grass carrying-ring and went to the water-hole with their nurse girl to fill it and carry it home without spilling the water.

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852 304 Children of Ngoni families, as also these others, chose their own time to have their ears pierced, though sometimes their father or father's sister or father's mother reminded them that it was about time. It was nearly always soon after the second teeth had come, and children who delayed having it done were taunted by their fellows: 'You, are you afraid, my age-mate? See my ears already have bone in them.' This [237] was a reference to the round plugs of bone inserted when the hole was large enough. A bit of thread was put in at first, then a small bit of grass, then a fine reed, and finally a bone plug. Ear piercing was always done in the cold weather so that the lobe of the ear would heal quickly. It was carried out by a leading woman of one of the Ngoni families, who watched the children to see how they took it. They knew it was a test of courage, and however much they were afraid it would hurt, [152] they stood like little statues during the operation, with a face as set and expressionless as when they were being beaten.

Accountability for individual behaviour was one aspect of 866 the responsibility which Ngoni adults now began to demand 868 from children. Another aspect was the performance of their allotted tasks. The responsibility for cattle herding was in a sense a corporate responsibility of all the boys whose fathers owned cattle. The older herd-boys had in fact to answer for [233] the condition of the cattle they brought back every evening to their owners. They passed on, however, a number of small duties, such as care of the calves, sheep and goats, to the younger boys, who in turn were held responsible by the older boys for performing these duties. The boys' world, centred in the dormitory, recognized grades of responsibility from which no one escaped.

Another facet of responsibility which was at a later stage 868 remarked on often by Ngoni adults, was seen in children's [517] choice of leisure-time occupations, according to their individual manual and intellectual and artistic capacities. They stopped playing childish games and began instead to develope their skills in making things from local materials.

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All of them made their own axes, knobkerries and catapults for hunting. Some were interested in music and made shepherds' pipes, or one-stringed lyres, or hand pianos of metal strips affixed to a wooden base. They composed their own songs and airs for these instruments. Others showed ingenuity in making elaborate models of lorries and aeroplanes, or in carving heads of animals. Others liked to weave fibre into the wide-brimmed hats some herd-boys wore.

More significant still for their future social relationships, they began now to choose their own intimate friend and to form the friendship pacts which were characteristic of Ngoni society, and regarded by adults as important in the child's development. In the friendship pacts, especially those between boys, there was no implied or manifest restraint. They could have 'joking relations', and hence say outrageous things to each other. They could quarrel and make it up, and defy each other's wishes and decisions, without a final breach. The relationship between friends often lasted into later adult life, and was probably all the stronger for the occasional lapses and outbursts, and by the fact that in the daily companionship of friends the burden of observing 'respect' did not oppress them.

The boys' dormitory

The hut known as the boys' dormitory and the whole system of living which it represented was a traditional feature of Ngoni village life. In their culture it had three main purposes. Formerly, when as they said 'War was our school', it was the place where boys slept and lived together, and where they learned to defend themselves and to obey authority. It was in a sense the preparatory school for the regiment, and the herding of cattle was the basis of the curriculum. Once a boy went to sleep in a dormitory he never left it until he married, unless he was seriously ill. In the days of warfare, he learned in the dormitory and out herding the cattle, a knowledge of the bush and its wild life and of his fellows, and

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VII

The Threshold of Adulthood (ii)

Knowledge and skills

867 Towards the end of the last chapter we said that in this following chapter we would be concerned with the knowledge and skills which young adults in Ngoni society needed before they could assume the adult role of setting up and managing a new home, and of taking part in village and national affairs. Here and there in earlier chapters there have been references to 'men's affairs' and the 'world of women', suggesting that there was a range of knowledge, of activities and of competence in those activities for which preparation and training was needed for those on the threshold of adulthood.

In talking with the Ngoni about the way in which they were handing on their traditional knowledge to the younger generations, they often distinguished between two kinds of knowledge: one a wide range of perceptions and information necessary to carry out daily and occasional activities in the household and village; and the other, a corpus of traditional lore about natural phenomena, and about their history and law. This is not altogether a valid distinction since both kinds of knowledge were traditional but it is a convenient way of approaching the two kinds of instruction given to young adults. The Ngoni were often apt to stress the importance of this second kind of knowledge because they resented the attitude of many Europeans that the Ngoni, and other African peoples, were 'ignorant' until the schools came. This touched them on a very sore point since they set great store on knowledge and wisdom in men and women, and did

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24. Learning to make fire

25. Explaining how to do it

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point, and other kinds of knowledge which in Ngoni culture were the basis for performing certain traditional activities. This second part of the chapter I have called traditional skills, to avoid the clumsiness of constantly differentiating between knowledge, skill and activities. Again, as in the first part of the chapter, we have to be selective, and I have chosen a few out of the typical Ngoni skills taught to young adults to make them efficient producers in the village economy, able to manage and direct various units of workers, and to be 'good company' in those pursuits which were for leisure time enjoyment. The young men's traditional skills which we shall look at are the care of cattle, hunting and some of their crafts; the young women's are the care of property, the storage and use of food-stuffs and some women's crafts. At the end of the chapter we shall look at certain Ngoni 'arts', which demanded individual and corporate skill of a special nature.

Men's skills: Care of cattle

The senior herd-boys, sons of cattle-owners, carried considerable responsibilities for the herds under their care during the day. By the time they gave up herding they had learned a great deal about cattle. Understanding about what constituted good herding had been handed on to them by their seniors, and they were well aware that losing an animal, failing to find good grazing so that the beasts became thin, letting them escape into the cultivated fields—all these were signs of bad herding and they would be punished accordingly by the cattle-owners. The daily scrutiny of the herds by the owners was made the occasion for blame or commendation. Every evening the owners of the cattle stood by the kraal gate as the boys drove the animals in, and the head herd-boys reported to the owners if a cow was sick, or if a bull had been mating.

Cattle-owners, since they were anxious that any cases of illness should be promptly reported, made a point of calling

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the older herd-boys when they were discussing 'cattle problems' in the evening. They took them into the kraal and showed them signs of the cattle not being well from the condition of the skin, udders, hoofs and mouth. The older boys were also called to be present if medicine was given to cattle, either some specific known to the owners, or treatment given by a 'specialist' called in, who might have real skill and knowledge about sick animals or be trying his luck with secret remedies known only to himself. The herd-boys were taught to notice the condition of other cattle than the ones of which they had charge, and to report on them. These might be cattle in other villages, or cattle belonging to their father's house 'boarded out' in another kraal according to Ngoni practice. The older herd-boys went with their father and his brothers to local markets where cattle were bought and sold, and listened to arguments about their condition which could make a difference of several pounds in the price they fetched.

When it had been decided in the village to kill a beast, for eating, or for selling the meat, or for a sacrifice, it was usually a young adult who was called to spear the animal. Some young men became adept at planting the spear behind the left shoulder in such a way that the beast dropped dead at once. At times two or more stabs were necessary, but it was a matter of pride and no small skill to succeed the first time. The senior herd-boys, who had driven the animal out of the kraal after separating it from its fellows, stood close round and watched attentively, for the stab had to be both accurate and forceful. The reputation of being skilful at killing a beast, of being a 'one stab' man, was greatly desired by herd-boys. They coveted equally the reputation of being skilful at flaying the beast. With carefully sharpened knives, in a few quick deft strokes, the young men slit the skin, opened it up and began to cut up the carcase. Like assistants at a surgical operation, the senior herd-boys held the knives, lifted a limb, turned back the skin, collected the blood, removed the

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231 561 severed portions. On branches of fresh leaves, brought by the younger herd-boys, were piled the sections of the animal, down to the last bit of intestine, for distribution according to a fixed Ngoni pattern.

231 825 A senior man of the house owning the beast, when all was ready, 'counted' all the parts, that is he named each part, head, horns, tail, feet, joints and internal organs, and each was pointed out to him as being present. The herd-boys standing round learned the names of the organs and the sections of the animal, and heard the names and status of the men to whom the parts were assigned. The herd-boys of the family of the owner were given certain symbolic parts: an ear, an eye and the nose, for hearing, seeing and smelling; parts of an artery and of an intestine as controlling the blood flow and the waste material, and the rectum as ejecting waste; and the foot for walking steadily and fast.

[868]

252 [251] Some of the meat was roasted over a fire, parts like the stomach and intestines were cleaned and boiled, some was dried slowly on a rack over a fire of green wood, and put in fibre bags for keeping. The blood was taken to the head woman of the house owning the herd. She cooked it with the fat round the kidneys till it coagulated and formed a dish, salty and meaty, much liked by the Ngoni, and rather akin to black pudding. The women also took over any spare fat and rendered it down and clarified it to use as unguents.

[278]

233 868 The young adult who had had six or seven years of herding cattle and had advanced to be a senior herd-boy, had acquired not only certain manual skills such as those just described, but also some knowledge of the anatomy of cattle, some idea of the social attitudes towards cattle and their ownership, and some idea of their economic value to the Ngoni. For certain restricted ritual purposes, a cow in calf had to be killed for sacrifice, and herd-boys saw the foetus removed when the cow was cut up. They were also often present at the birth of calves in the bush, and had to wait

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round to protect the cow and calf, until they were strong enough to go back to the kraal. 868 233

The intricate system of ownership of cattle, including the relation between a house and a herd, and between certain herds and the spirits of former great people, was part of a herd-boy's background knowledge. He listened at the kraal gate to the men discussing questions of ownership. When a decision was taken to kill a beast, or sell one, or to transfer one or more at a marriage, or to hand over a beast in payment of a fine, the senior boys knew which group of beasts in the kraal must be driven out to be looked over in order that a selection could be made by the man concerned. [422] [825]

The Ngoni classified their cattle according to age, sex, colouring, size and shape of horns, whether castrated or not, whether in calf or not. Knowledge of the extensive series of names used for these 'classes' of cattle was part of a herd-boy's A.B.C. By the time he was old enough to be told to drive certain cattle out of the kraal, designated by their class, he knew exactly which ones were meant. He could also use the cattle terminology to be precise in telling an owner about a beast which had strayed or one that had a sore hoof, or one that was giving an exceptionally good or poor flow of milk. [192]

Herd-boys learned that cattle constituted a form of wealth, not only by the numbers a man possessed and could display, but also because they were easily realizable assets. Cattle could be sold to pay taxes, debts and court fines; and to pay men working for an Ngoni owner of cotton or tobacco gardens. They learned also that since cattle could be converted into money, the men of the house owning the cattle could use the money to buy cloth. This cloth, the property of the house, was kept and looked after by the senior women, who would lend it out temporarily to young men wishing to dress up smartly to go courting or go on a visit. [556] [432] [465] [248] [249] [292]

In the modern forms of Nyasaland economy it was a 177 233 234

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177 natural translation for Ngoni young men to become butchers
233 and dairymen, if they could apprentice themselves to a rela-
234 tive, or if their father could put up the necessary capital outlay for starting independently. This conversion of knowledge and traditional skill into a channel offering higher rewards in cash incomes found the young Ngoni adult well prepared to earn his living.

Hunting

224 There was an aura of manhood and of distinction about all forms of hunting among the Ngoni. They did it because they enjoyed it, and not seriously to augment their family's food supply. There were two main corporate forms of hunting: the chase, when hare and deer were hunted with dogs; and killing lions and leopards. The first was the pursuit of a Ngoni gentleman which no one wanted to miss during the right season; and the second was the act of warriors defending themselves and their cattle and villages from marauders.

868 Ngoni boys in their herding days acquired some of the
224 skills needed later for hunting with the men. They made traps to catch birds from the hair of cows tails or smeared bird lime on branches. They developed great adroitness at hitting birds on the wing with knobkerries. In these pursuits, which for them were half fun, half to get bits of extra food, they were training their eye, learning to observe the habits of birds and small animals, learning to track them, and developing that combination of patience, prompt action and accuracy of aim essential to successful hunting.

Some of the Ngoni men liked to go off hunting on their own, usually those who had a gun. Fathers used to take their sons on such hunting trips, and use the opportunity to teach them how to track successfully, how to put up with hunger and thirst on long marches, how to load and fire a gun. One young man described how his father used to point out to him on such trips the birds and butterflies in the bush. On one trip his father taught him to use his muzzle-loading gun, how

to carry it safely when loaded and how to aim carefully. His father, who was a noted preacher, then likened aiming in shooting to aims in life: 'There are many things in the world, and when you see them you will think that you can have them all at once. But you will fail if you have no aim and do not choose what you want to aim at.' 868 224

The 'chase', the main Ngoni form of hunting in a group, took place in the hot dry season, after the grass fires and before the first rains fell. A leading man who wanted to hunt sent messengers to neighbouring villages to announce that a hunt would be held on a certain day in such and such an area. The form of the message was the same as that for mobilization for war. The villagers turned out in companies according to their old military formations; and on the night before the hunt they slept apart from their wives, as when mobilized for a campaign. On reaching the hunting site, the slope of a hill, or the head of a valley, or a shallow depression, the important people were in the centre, the ordinary men around them and the youths on the wing. All could come to the hunt, masters and servants alike. 224 [221]

Etiquette was strict about the kill. The first man who wounded the game with his spear called out his name, the second who inflicted a wound did the same, and so did the man who dealt the final blow. All those three were entitled to some part of the animal according to his share in the killing, and part was set aside for the 'owner' of the hunt. Spears were used in this kind of hunt, and those who had no spears, chiefly the non-Ngoni servants and lesser villagers, used long hunting-knives and knobkerries. No guns were taken on this kind of chase, but dogs accompanied the huntsmen. These dogs were trained for hunting and tracking game, and were lean and fierce but under control by their owners. Accompanying the main body of huntsmen were skilled trackers who knew the area well and could guide the hunt, calling out at intervals one of the Ngoni war-cries: 'Listen. Do you hear me? I say the game is over there.'

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

Women's skills: Guardianship of property

Ngoni social organization, as we saw in Chapter I, placed the guardianship of all wealth except cattle in the hands of the women who were heads of houses. As a Ngoni girl grew towards adulthood and the time drew nearer when she would marry and leave her home for a strange village, the leading women of her father's house initiated her into the skills needed to create and preserve the forms of property for which she would some day be responsible.

First among these skills came the care of the hut and compound. The framework and roof of the huts were built by men, but the walls were mudded and the floors of the hut and veranda were strengthened and polished by women. Ngoni women of good family did not often do the actual plastering of mud upon the wooden framework of the hut. It was considered too dirty and exhausting a job for them to do, but they had to know how it should be done, and what standards of good work involved, in order that they might later instruct others. During a hut building Ngoni girls might be seen tucking up their clothes and rather half-heartedly slapping mud on the walls, to the good-humoured jesting of the village women who were vigorous and expert at the job. The girl's grandmother stood by and said at intervals: 'That is too thick; it will fall off. Fill up those cracks. Smooth over those joins,' and so on. The girls shrugged their shoulders and obeyed while Grandmother was watching, but gave up as soon as she went away.

The flat-ended flails with which the floor was beaten were heavy and girls were generally unable to use them expertly, but they were made to watch the process, with its seemingly endless beating of the earth floor compounded of river mud, ant-hill clay and cowdung. Once the floor was beaten so that it was level and all cracks had disappeared, the Ngoni girls were made to get down on their knees and learn how to polish it with damp ashes and a smear of cowdung, rubbed

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

Maize, the Ngoni staple cereal which had replaced the tall millet they had formerly preferred, was stored on the cob in the grain stores which were described in Chapter IV. Women whose husbands could afford to hire labour to work in their fields often had three or four large grain stores, and their presence in the compound conferred importance on their owners. Inside the hut were earthenware jars of beans, cowpeas, bulrush millet, clarified fat and butter, dried chillies, while from the rafters hung bunches of herbs and dried green spinach. Some of the jars were polished a shining black, others had a blue or green glaze on them. It was a Ngoni girl's ambition to go to her new home when married with a good array of storage pots, baskets, mats, spoons, stirring sticks, and a wooden meat-dish. This would show her in-laws that she was industrious and intended to have a high standard of household management in her new home.

Varieties of food and their preparation

Ngoni women prided themselves on feeding their households well, both in variety, quantity and quality. Although they could rely on helpers to work in the gardens and to do some of the preparing of food before cooking, they always managed their own supplies and provided a variety of menus, and showed that they could cook well themselves and instruct others.

Ngoni girls clustered round the fire when a special dish was being prepared. They watched every movement of their mother as she lifted one pot off the fire and put another on, measured out water in a spoon to add to the sauce, stirred the maize porridge strongly and evenly to get rid of lumps and bubbles, washed each stirring stick in a pot of water before using it again.

There was variety in the dishes served from day to day in big Ngoni households, usually in the form of a main dish of cereal with side dishes of broth and vegetables and less often of meat or chicken. The main dish was served in the

10: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1959
FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

233 are out at pasture all day under the charge of herdboys, and may be brought in for milking in the early afternoon, later returning to the bush. Alternatively they are not milked until they come in just before sunset to be put in their byres for the night. These activities are
857 organized by the herdboys, who range from five up to about twelve
233 years in age. All the boys in a village take part in herding, whether or not their parents own cattle. A man keeps all his cattle in the village in one byre, although he may also have cattle in other villages under the care of relatives. The boys attach themselves to definite byres, and the senior boy of the group becomes responsible for all the cattle in the byre. He sees that the cattle do not stray into gardens during the season when they may damage the crops, and he checks that all the
● [868] cattle return at night. He instructs the younger boys in the art of milking, and supervises the allocation of the milk, which is his perquisite. Cattle from all the byres in the village may be herded together. After the harvest the cattle are often left to wander where they please and the boys occupy themselves in the village or hunting for rabbits until it is time to round up the cattle for milking.

628 There are no definite pastures associated with one village rather
233 than with another, so that the herds from one village may come into
857 contact with those from another. This may lead to fighting between the two groups of herdboys, and also, if it can be managed, between
[541] the bulls of the villages. Boys take pride in the fighting ability of their bulls, and sometimes seek out other herds in order to demonstrate the superior strength of themselves and their animals. It is significant that informants referred always to fights between bulls of different villages, and not of fights between bulls from different byres in the same village, although these do occur.

233 In the past, herding was carried out by older boys, and life as a herd-
833 boy was terminated only by enrolment into a regiment. Inter-village
857 fighting went on partly to demonstrate that the boys concerned were now strong enough to join the army. At the present time boys of twelve and younger are employed on tobacco farms, and many attend school. Some cattle owners have to pay boys to come from other villages to herd their cattle as there are no boys available in the village itself, while others obtain the services of young girls.

Inter-village Relationships

628 Villages are grouped together into counties, under a minor chief,
631 and in some counties there are recognized subdivisions that I shall